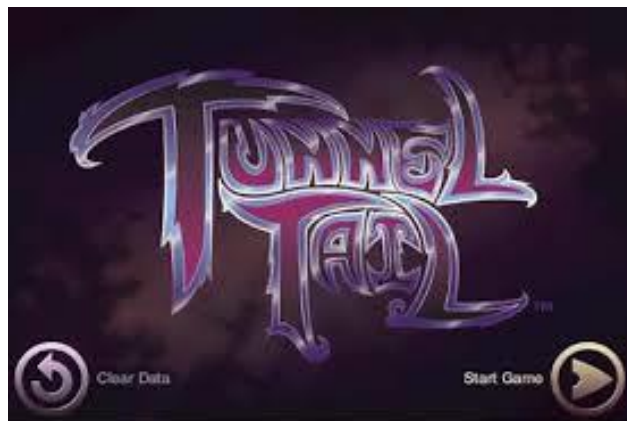# Romance Games: Unpopular Genre or Untapped Market?

Heidi McDonald
Narrative Designer, Schell Games
www.deathbow.com

Journal and Academic Articles

- "NPC Romance as a Safe Space: BioWare and Healthier Identity Tourism," Carnegie Mellon ETC "Well Played" Journal, July, 2012
- "Epic Awesomeness: An Exploration of Art, Play, Love and Death in Video Games," Chatham University, May, 2012

Conferences

- Media and Social Change Conference, Chatham University, 2012
- Feminists in Games, 2012, "The NPC Romance Project"
- GDC Online, 2012, "Writing the Romance-able NPC: ICING on the Content Cake"
- GDC 2013, "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Ferelden"
- Gotland Gaming Conference, 2013
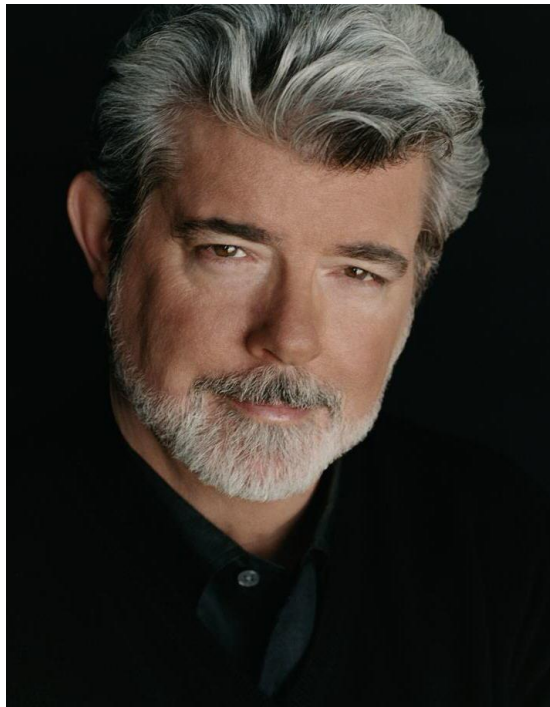
"The big game of the next five years will be a game where you empathize very strongly with the characters and it's aimed at women and girls. They like empathetic games. That will be a huge hit and as a result that will be the Titanic of the game industry, where suddenly you've done an actual love story or something and everybody will be like 'where did that come from?' Because you've got actual relationships instead of shooting people."

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ROMANCE GENRE

?

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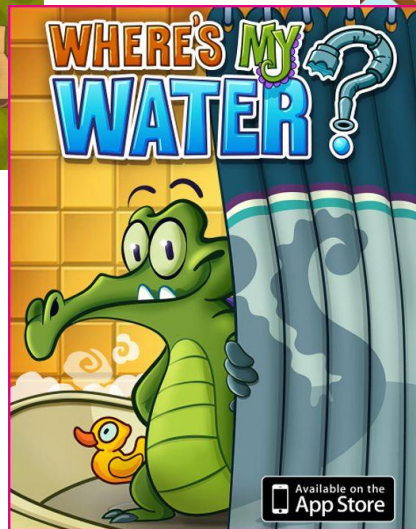
ROMANCE GENRE

?

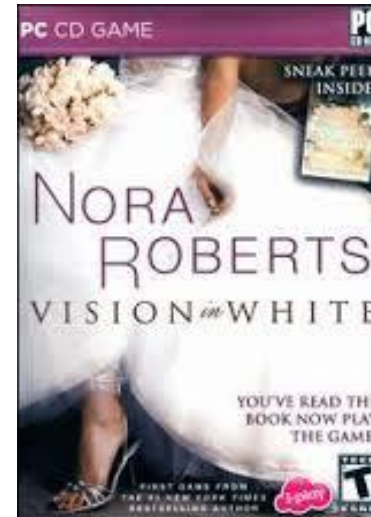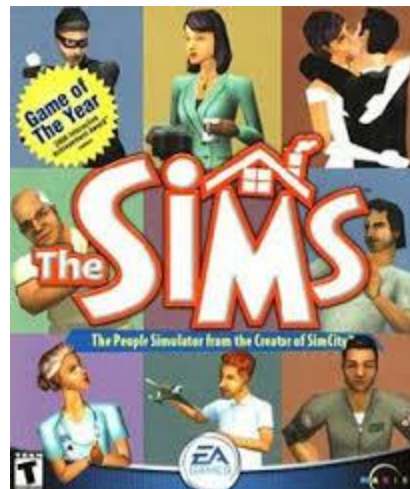# ROMANCE GENRE

(Hidden Object Adventures)

(Playable Romance Novel)

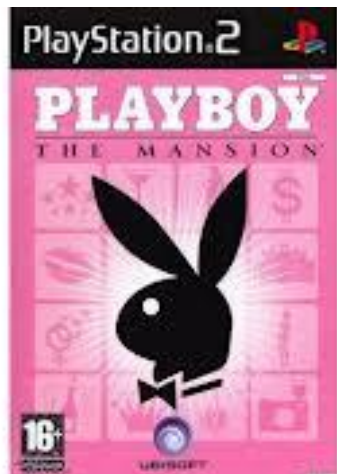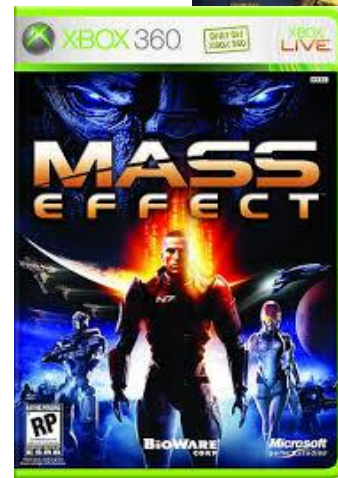# PAGEANT-STYLE GAMES

OTOME

ROMANCE SIMULATION

JRPG's WITH
DATING SIM ELEMENTS

WRPG's WITH ROMANCE SYSTEMS

WRPG's WITH ROMANCE SYSTEMS
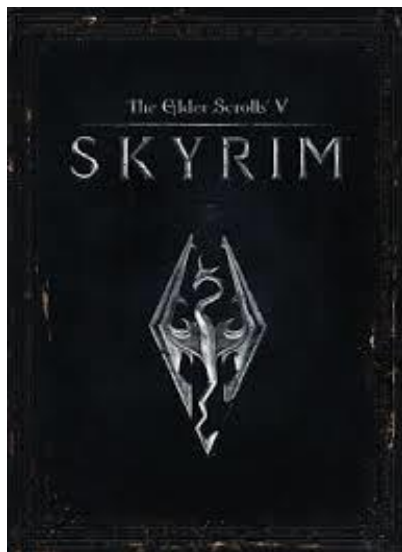
WRPG:

Romance System

Changes or affects the world or the meta-narrative

Couplehood is a goal that's part of a larger story

JRPG:

Dating Sim

May not change or affect the world or the meta-narrative

Couplehood is often the end goal

HENTAI / ADULT

Japanese

- Odd themes
- Anime style

Western

- Straight sex, usually
- More realism in style

Both

- Visual consumption of sexual acts
- More interested in the visual aspects of physical relationship than the empathic aspects of the emotional relationship.

Adult Titles

- Based in the visual and physical
- Sex acts are the main goal
- The risk involves social stigma

Empathic Titles

- Based in the emotional
- Sex exists as part of a larger relationship
- The risk involves past failures

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Most Common Romance Mechanics

- Multiple Choice
- Stat Management
- Transactional

Multiple Choice / Invisible Stat

Stat Management

Transactional

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Hybrid Example

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NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS

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What's in a Romance?

Gamers Say About Romance Games:

- Relationships (whether physical or emotional)
- Pursuit/conquest (by the player or by the NPC)
- (In most cases,) some sort of consequence to gameplay, in varying degrees of importance and using varying mechanics

Romance Writers of America Say About Romance Novels:

- Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally-satisfying, optimistic ending.

In a year when SONY lost 48% and Nintendo, 51%...

GREE ⬆ 100%

:DeNA ⬆ 23%

Vo VOLTAGE ⬆ 21%

Source: Tokyo Times

ROMANCE SUCCESS

?

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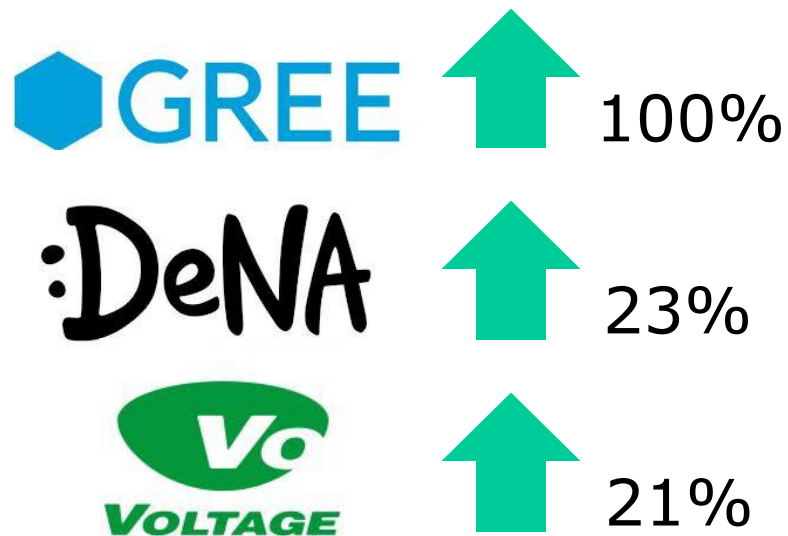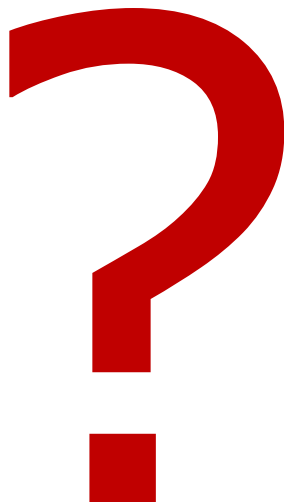
THE RISE
OF THE FEMALE GAMER

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Stigma

Accepted

Tom Abernathy
Senior Narrative Designer, Riot Games

- "Our audience is leaving us behind. The world is changing, it has already changed, and we have not been doing a very good job of keeping up with it."
- "Women are not a small special market on the fringe of the core. Women ARE the new core."

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Romance Writers of America:

- Women make up 91 percent of romance book buyers, and men make up 9 percent.

Entertainment Software Association:

- 45% of all game-players are women, and women 18+ represent a much higher usage than boys 17 or younger

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- 44% of romance readers buy their material digitally, followed by 29% in mass-paperback.

- More than half of young women (57%) say they talk to people online more than face-to-face. A full 39% of them proclaim themselves Facebook addicts, while 34% of young women make Facebook the first thing they do when they wake up, even before brushing their teeth or going to the bathroom.

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MARKET AGE:
THE SWEET SPOT
APPROACHES

Brenda Bailey Gershkovitz
CEO, Silicon Sisters

- Silicon Sisters' research has found that women are receptive to buying games
- Big Fish has great success with women, and their market is similar to Silicon Sisters'.
- *Everlove* is a game geared not to traditional gamers, but to romance readers as a playable romance novel experience…for empathic players.

Romance Writers of America:
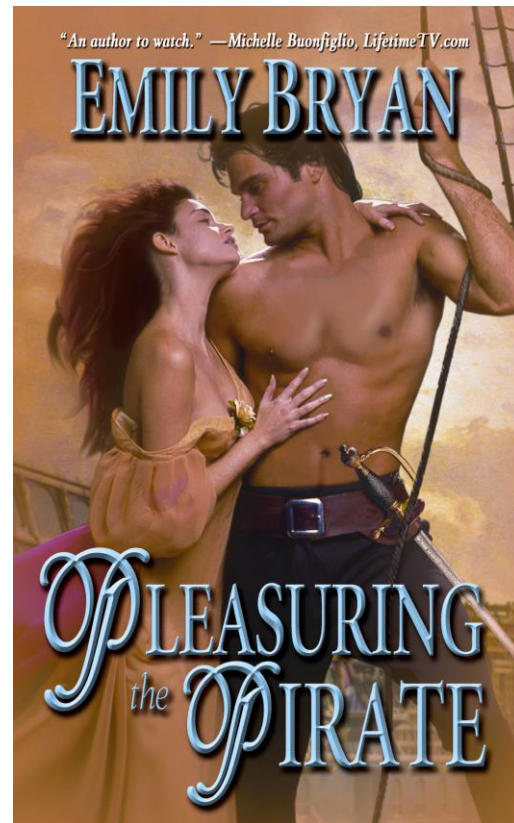
- The U.S. romance book buyer is most likely to be aged between 30 and 54 years.
- Mean age for print romance book buyers: 49; Mean age for e-book romance buyers: 42

Entertainment Software Association:

- Over the past 5 years, average age has stayed in the 30s

"*An author to watch.*" —*Michelle Buonfiglio, LifetimeTV.com*

EMILY BRYAN

PLEASURING the PIRATE

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Gamer Data:
Avg, ESA

Reader Data:
Mean, RWA

Ages of Romance Readers and Gamers

Chart showing Age (y-axis, 30–55) versus Years (x-axis: 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Readers: 44.6 (2008), 44.6 (2009), 42 (2010), 42 (2011)
Gamers: 35 (2008), 35 (2009), 37 (2010), 37 (2011)

Legend: Readers, Gamers

Projected Age Overlap
Romance Readers and Gamers

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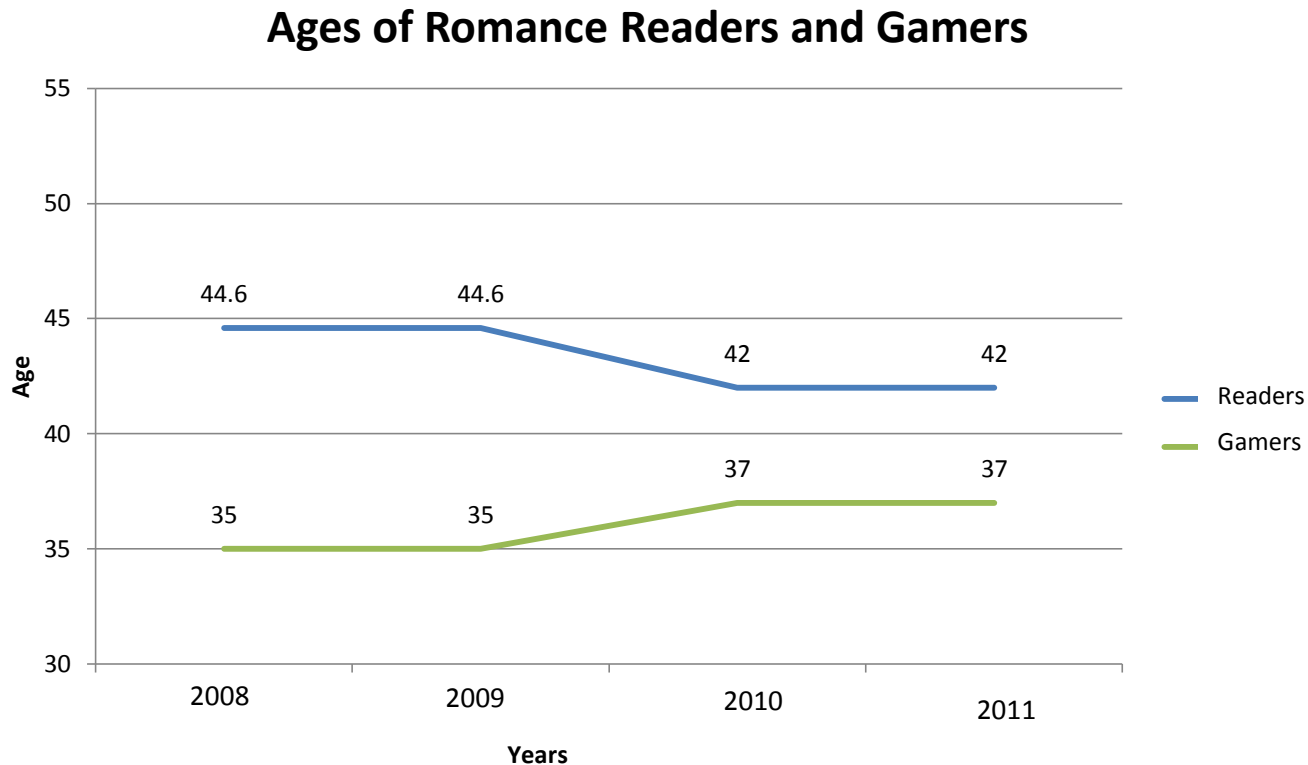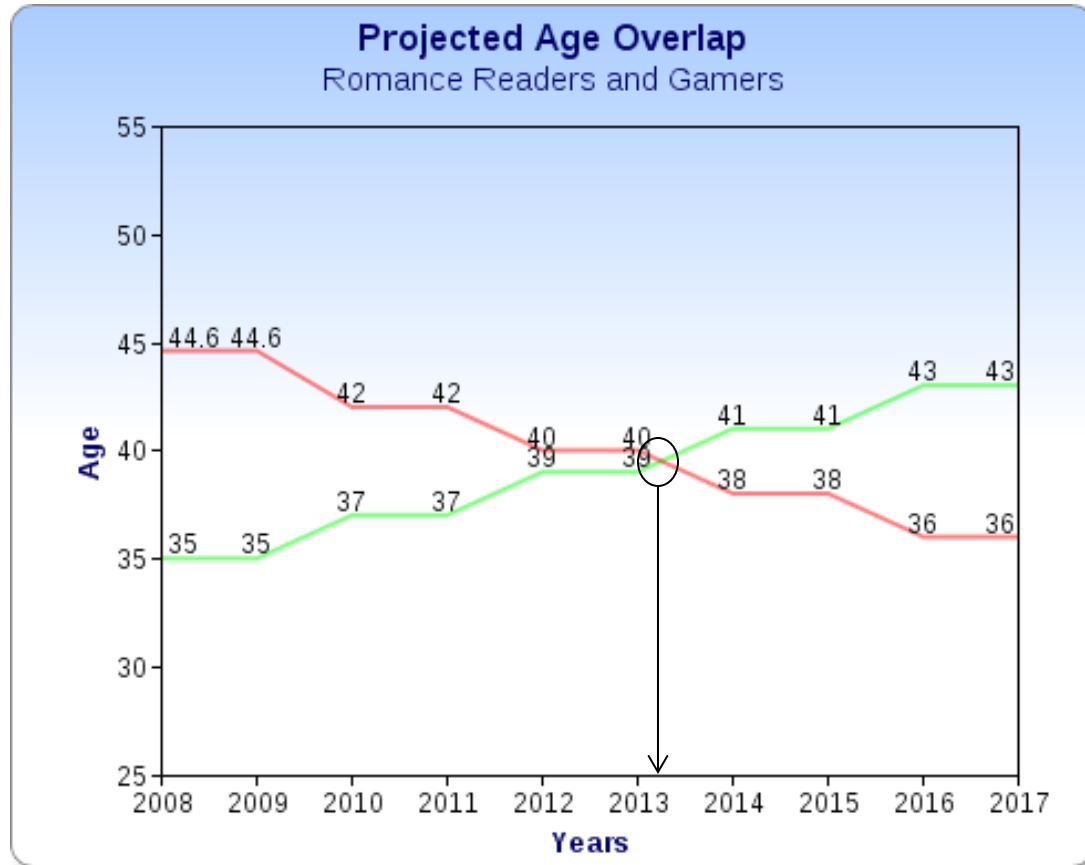
"It's gonna take off like crazy. I've bet money on it."

~Brenda Bailey Gershkovitz,
to GameSprout's Amanda Lange

silicon sisters

THE DIGITAL DATING GAME

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Lee Sheldon
Author and Professor

- "The internet has already become a big romance game."
- "Romance games have not failed because of the romance component but for the same reasons any other game might fail."

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Statistical

Of 54 million single people in the US,
40 million (74%) have tried online dating, which is a billion-dollar industry in the US.

Anecdotal

10 years ago, 1 in 7 married couples met online, now it's 1 in 4.

HYBRID GENRES AS A DRIVER FOR ROMANCE GAMES

Jennifer Brandes Hepler
Senior Narrative Designer

- "Most female gamers want their romance stories set to a strong sci-fi or fantasy backdrop."
- "A gateway, breakthrough kind of romance game marketed to high school or college-aged females, might work if it borrows the right elements from the right places."
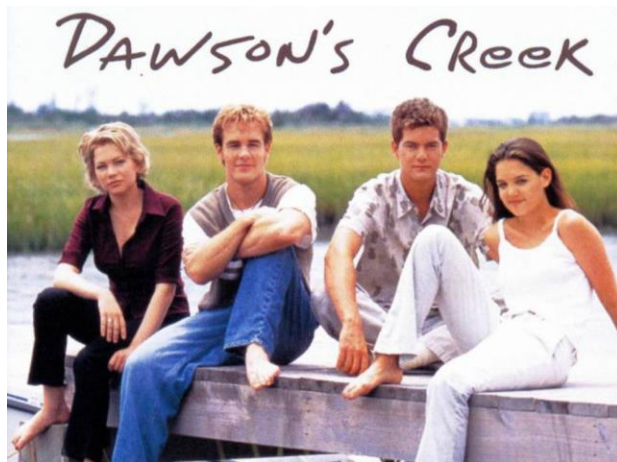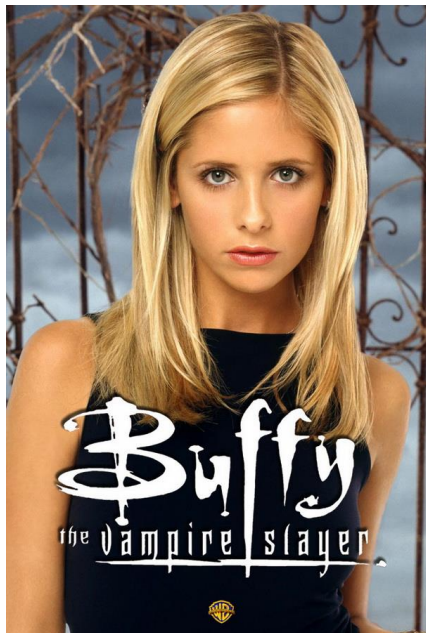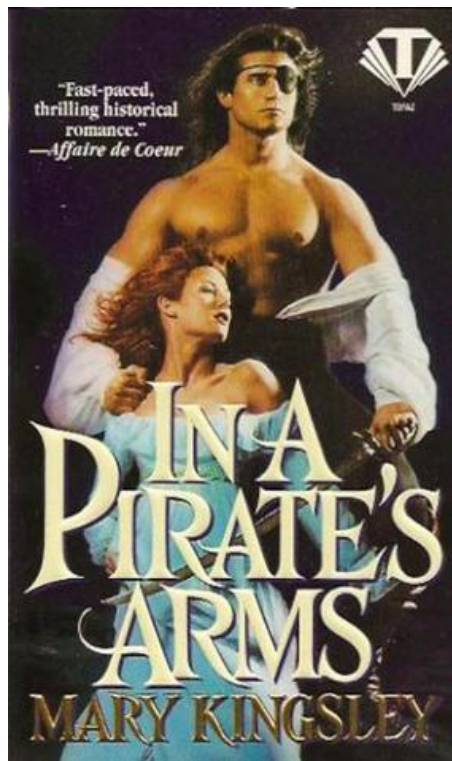
Romance Writers of America:

The top overall decision factor in buying a romance novel is the story (50 percent), with the author following at 19 percent.

The NPC Romance Project:

89% of single-player RPG players romance to see where the narrative goes.

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"empathetic games"

"empathic players"

EMPATHIC vs. NARRATIVE

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Less emotional

	36 to 38
	39 to 41
	42 to 44
	45 to 47
	48 to 50
	51 to 53
	54 +

More emotional

Source: Washington Post

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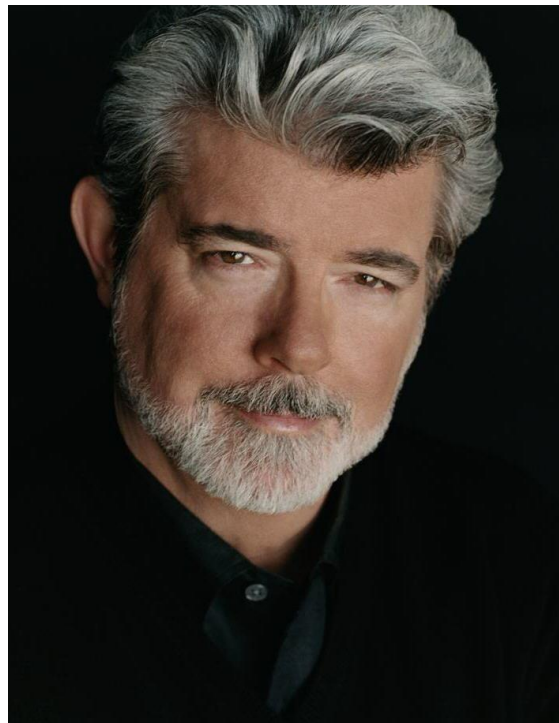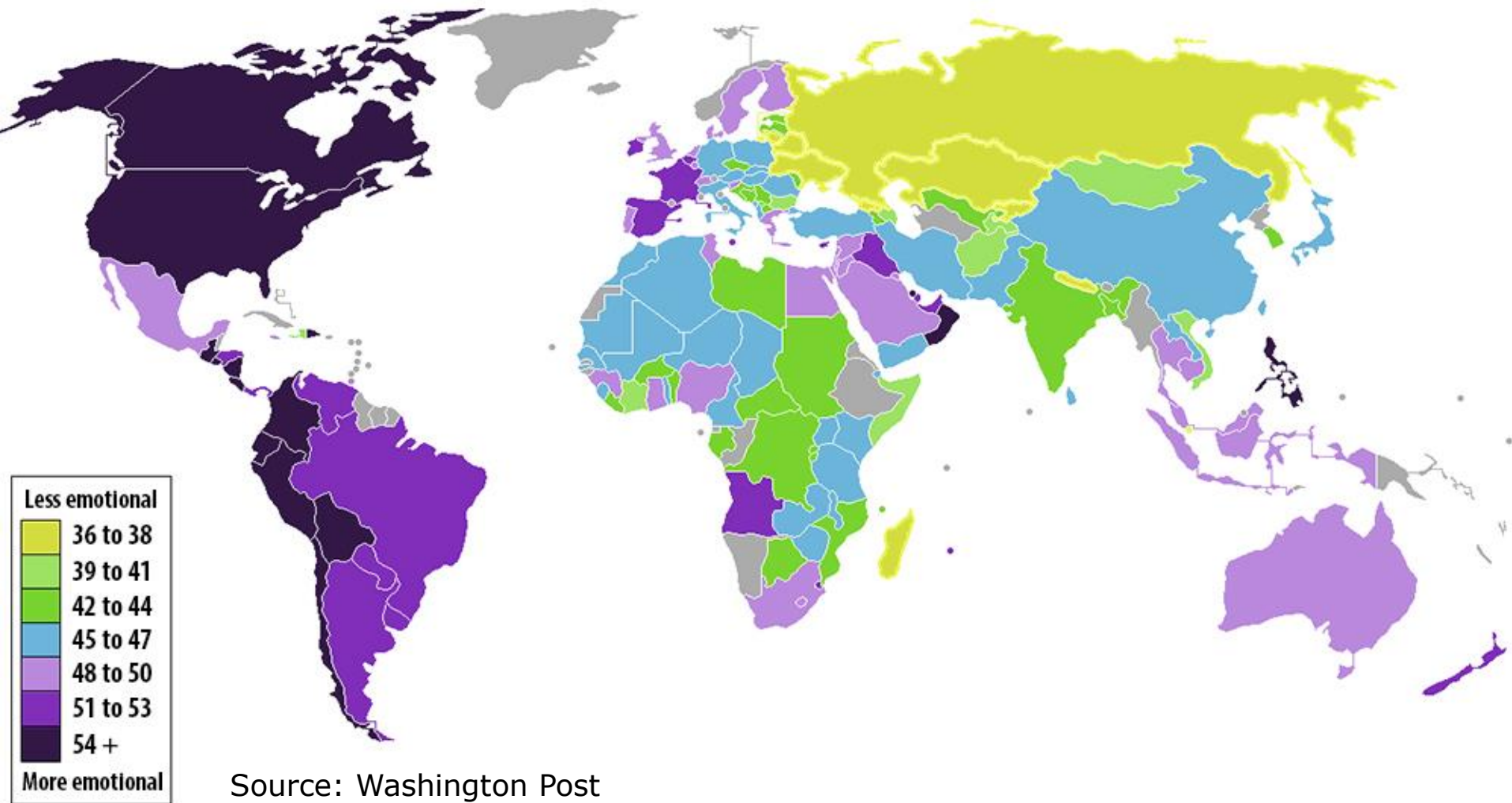
IT CAN WORK

- Demographic overlap
- Digitized romance novels
- Rising computer literacy level
- Stigma of being a "gamer" decreasing
- Romance being important to customers
- THE RISE OF EMPATHIC GAMES

ROMANCE GAMES

- Relationships (Physical and emotional)
- Pursuit/conquest (by either player or NPC, by either gender toward either gender)
- Consequence to gameplay (mechanics)
- Central love story
- Emotionally-satisfying, optimistic ending

Become Part of the Conversation!

NEW ROMANCE SURVEY:

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Chris Klug	Gay Game Industry Professionals (GGP)
Jennifer Brandes Hepler	Feminists in Games
Jason VandenBerghe	Women in Gaming
Dr. Jane McGonigal	Tim Sweeney

…and numerous others who have contacted me
to become part of the important
"Romance in Games" conversation!

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K and C Fox
Rainknight
Dr. Dawn Scott
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Amy Mihara
Connor Fallon
Tim and Barbara Brengle

SCHELL GAMES

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